

Jackson County Historical Society News

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The Shields-Ethridge Farm was originally settled in 1799 by James Shields and remains as an active farm today. The Shields-Ethridge Heritage Farm Foundation, Inc. is a non-profit organization established to preserve the existing buildings on the 152 acres. The farm is an outdoor, agricultural museum that functions as an educational and interpretative facility. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on June 25, 1992 as a historic district that includes 65 historic resources on over 500 acres dating from the 1800-1930s. The district is significant for representing an intact piedmont Georgia farmstead with a multitude of agricultural, industrial, and domestic resources”.

The Jackson County Historical Society will have the annual Hot Dog Picnic at the Shields Ethridge Farm, 2355 Ethridge Rd, Jefferson, Georgia 30549, on Sept 11 at 6:30 p.m. All members and prospective members are invited to attend. The cookout is across the street from the house in the tractor shed.

Directions from Athens; Go North out of Athens on Highway 129 (Prince Avenue) towards Jefferson. Highway 129 feeds into the Damon Gause Bypass near Arcade. There is a brown DOT sign on the right side of the road that says Shields Ethridge Farm. Turn Left on Ethridge Road (SR 319) just after passing through Arcade. The Farm is located two miles on the right.

Jackson County Historical Society

P.O. Box 1234, Commerce, Georgia 30529

(706) 207-6889

Newsletter

Jackson County Historical Society dues run from September to September and can be mailed to:

Jackson County Historical Society
P. O. Box 1234, Commerce, GA 30529:

Individual –\$15, Family –\$25, LIFE members –\$100

The Historical Society's collection contains research books on North Georgia counties, the Carolinas and Virginia, surnames and family files, and microfilm housed in the Heritage Room of the Commerce Public Library. A new microfilm scanner is available for the census, newspapers, Confederate pension records and various films. It has the capabilities to send images as an e-mail and copy to a flash drive. An index of the collection and past newsletters from 1997-2013 can be viewed on the library website:

<http://prlib.org/our-libraries/commerce-public-library/>

The Historical Society has been working on a document recovery project that will be archived in the old Historic Jackson County Courthouse. Your donation and membership help to pay for a quarterly newsletter and continue projects.

JCHS Officers 2013-2014

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|----------------------|--|
| President: | Shirley Wilson |
| Vice-President: | Marie Parks |
| Recording Secretary: | Boniface McDaniel |
| Treasurer: | Tommy Benton |
| Directors: | James Mathis Jerry Legg |
| Past Presidents: | the late, Joyce Ethridge the late, Ann A. Jarrett the late, Richard Chambers the late, Jean H. Booth Betty Ann Mathis James Mathis Ralph Freeman Carol Tanner Marie Parks Tina Harris Charlotte Mealor Caine Campbell |

Shields-Ethridge Farm

excerpt from <http://shieldsethridgefarminc.com>

Joseph Shields and his family settled on the Georgia frontier, in 1802. With two slaves, they cleared the land and raised crops, chiefly grains. When Joseph died in 1818 he owned 294 acres of land, hand tools for farming, and cows, pigs, and sheep.

Joseph's son, James, was willed the land, livestock and tools. He bought 60 acres of land to add to his property. James and Charity Shields had six children, and their two sons fought in the Confederate army. When James died in 1863, Charity was left all the property. In 1865, Charity signed a contract with three former slaves. In exchange for food and a place to live, the three women helped Charity run the farm.

Joseph Robert Shields, the eldest son, returned from the war and built the present main residence on the property in 1866. As the story goes, the new home was paid for with two bales of cotton. The women who were left to manage hid the bales from enemy troops and Confederate tax collectors, according to the story.

Joseph Robert Shields continued to farm, growing corn, wheat, and oats. On about half the land, cotton was grown. The farm produced some livestock products and small amounts of fruits and vegetables were grown. Joseph Robert's wife died in 1896, and he asked his daughter, Susan Ella to return home. Susan Ella was newly married to Ira Washington Ethridge, when they came back to live at the Farm in 1897.

Ira Ethridge began planning and building a sharecroppers' village, believing that a cotton farm could prosper. Under Ira Ethridge's management, the size of the farm more than doubled. The years 1900 to 1920 were successful years at the Shields-Ethridge Farm. Sharecroppers worked the land, and in return for a share of the crop were provided a house, a mule, and cotton seed. Everything a sharecropper needed would soon be found here.

In 1900 a Commissary, or store, was built, as well as a blacksmith shop, a milking barn were built. An engine, equipped with different pulleys, powered a grist mill, a hammer mill (where corn cobs were pounded into feed for livestock), and a planing mill. A sawmill was built behind the gin, but is no longer standing. In 1909 the Bachelors' Academy was built, and a new cotton gin was constructed in 1910. The wheat house was also built



in 1910, where wheat was stored upstairs and wagons downstairs.

After a fire that destroyed the gin house in 1910, Ira Ethridge built a water tower in 1913 to prevent another disaster. He also built a mule barn and a smokehouse. Ira Ethridge became known for his good business sense.

As business improved, Ira Ethridge improved the main house. In 1914 the porch to the house was raised and white columns were added. A screened sleeping porch was built upstairs. New windows were installed, and the old “nine over nine” (nine panes) were removed.

A new dairy barn was built in 1925, along with additional tenant houses. The sharecroppers’ village hummed along, and a gin office was added in 1930, along with a barber shop.

Setbacks came with success, however. In 1920, the boll weevil arrived. The stock market crashed in 1929, and the price of cotton also fell. While many were out of work during the Great Depression, sharecroppers had homes and work at the Shields-Ethridge Farm. In 1940 there were 26 mules still working the farm, and all the cotton fields had been terraced to prevent erosion. Ira Ethridge was a competent farmer, and the sharecroppers’ village he created provided goods and services for the area.

Technology soon changed the sharecroppers’ village. Mechanization was in full swing, after electricity was brought to rural areas. Tractors replaced mules; cotton

harvesters replaced humans. Ira Ethridge died in 1945 and his son, Lanis, saw what was ahead. Small farmers could not afford the high price of new equipment. Lanis purchased his first bull for cattle breeding in the early 1950s. He also experimented with mechanical pickers in the 1960s. However, the Ethridge gin could not remove the dirt picked up by the mechanical pickers. The cotton gin needed updating, but prices for cotton were falling.

Finally, in 1964, Lanis decided to close the gin. The last cotton crop was grown in 1969. When Lanis Ethridge died in 1970, the sharecroppers’ village was a ghost village. The land returned to pasture and is now a poultry and cattle farm.

The mechanization of agriculture forced the owners of the Shields-Ethridge Farm to adapt. In 1970, Joyce Ethridge (Lanis’ widow) began documenting the history of the farm. By 1992, 140 acres and over fifty structures were placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The nomination said: “these outbuildings represent the broadest assortment of 19th and 20th century domestic, agricultural, and industrial buildings known to exist on a single farm in Georgia.” A year later, the Shields-Ethridge Heritage Farm was recognized as a Centennial Farm in Georgia.

The Bachelors’ Academy was restored in 1996, and a master plan for creating an agricultural museum was prepared. Today the owners stress education to increase an understanding of Georgia’s agricultural and history.



PREACHER RILEY'S HOUSE



SEED HOUSE



COTTON GIN



BACHELORS' ACADEMY



LOG CORN CRIB



MULE BARN

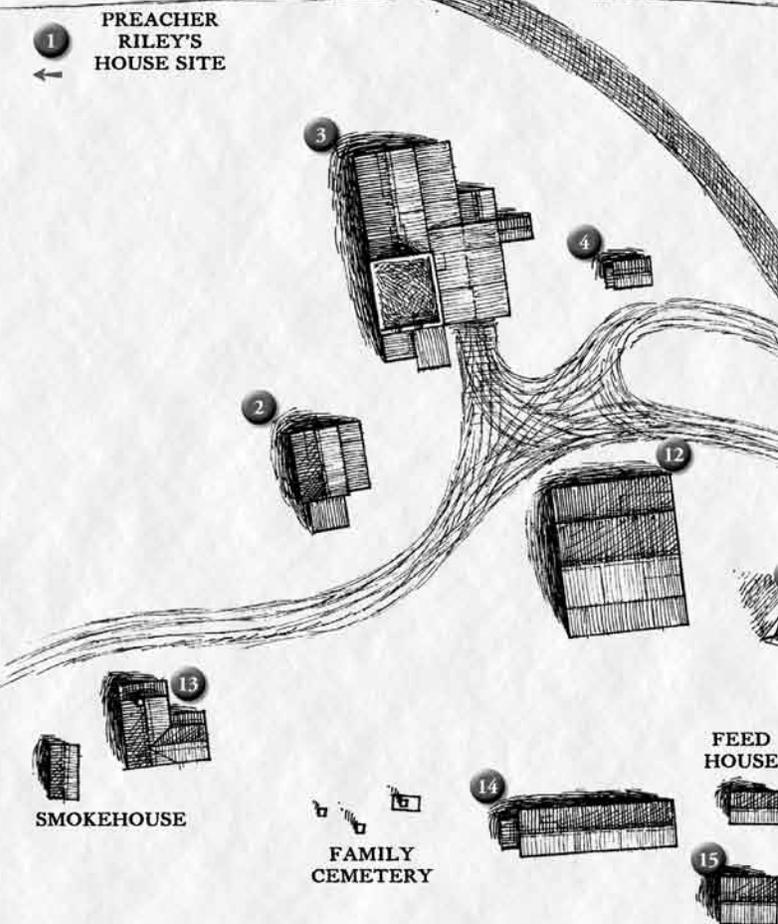


CONCRETE CORN CRIB



MILKING BARN

JOHNSON MILL



PREACHER RILEY'S HOUSE SITE

SMOKEHOUSE

FAMILY CEMETERY

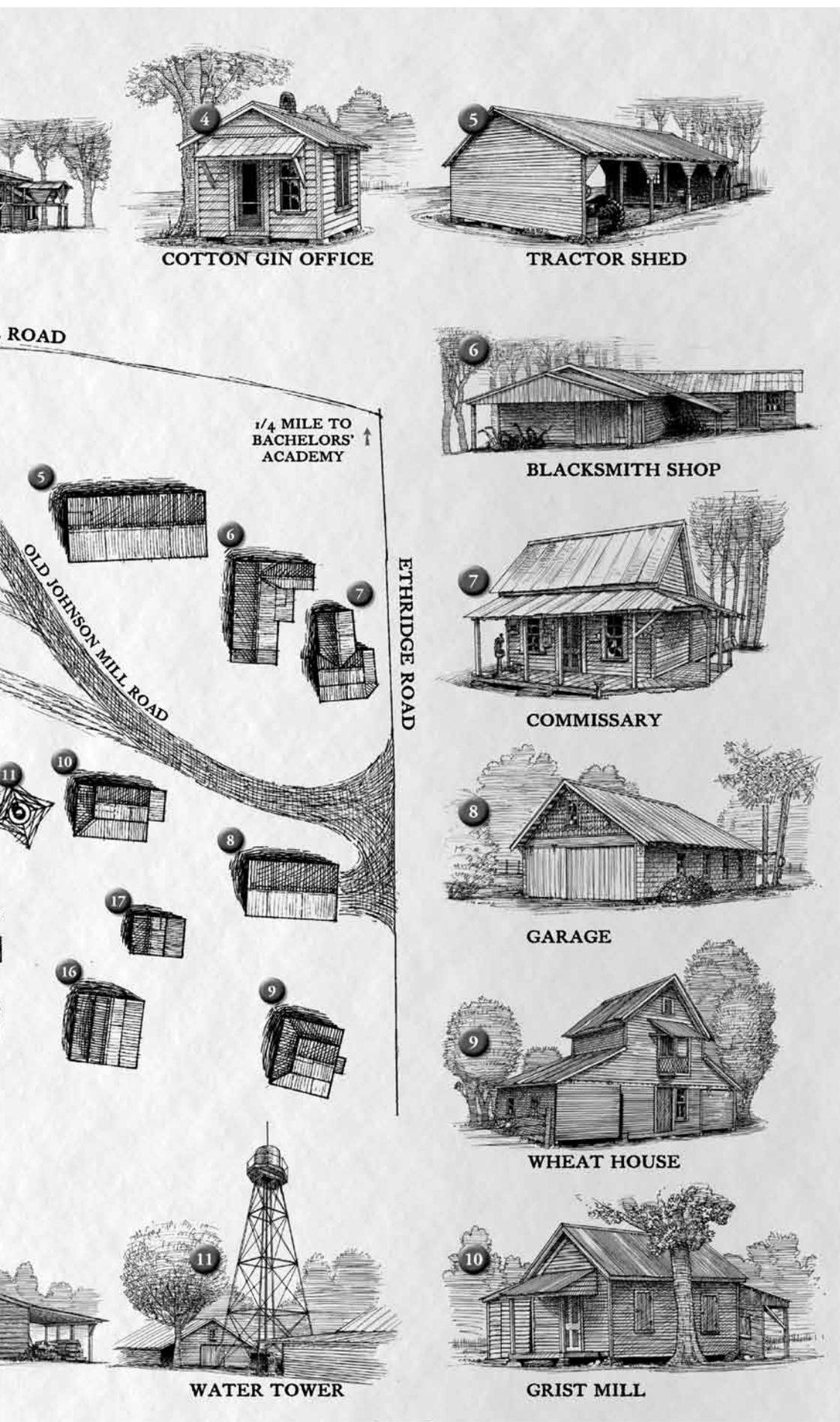
FEED HOUSE



TEACHER'S HOUSE



WAREHOUSE



COTTON GIN OFFICE

TRACTOR SHED

BLACKSMITH SHOP

COMMISSARY

GARAGE

WHEAT HOUSE

GRIST MILL

WATER TOWER



Spend a fall day, October 18, 2014, at the Shields-Ethridge Heritage Farm Festival and see cooking the way it used to be. Participate in children's games. Watch demonstrations by basket maker, Jerry Waldrop and other crafts. Farm buildings, including the gristmill and cotton gin will be open. Enjoy Blue Grass Gospel Music.

Menu

Cooked outdoors over an open fire, the menu includes:

Chicken and Dumplings

Black-eyed Peas

Turnip Greens

Cornbread

Sweet Potatoes

Fruit Cobblers

Drinks

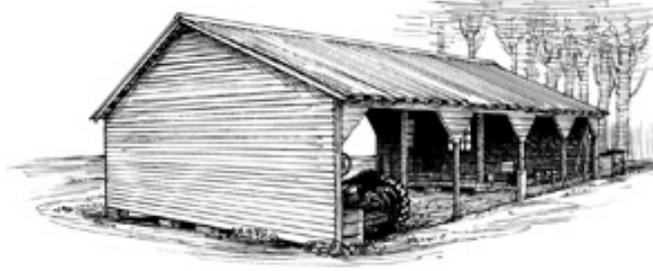
Admission

Adults \$15.00

Children \$10.00 (12 and under)

*Admission includes entry to the farm as well as a plate of goodies, drink, and bluegrass/gospel music. *Limited number of tickets available. Information at www.shieldsethridgefarminc.com or call 706-367-2949.*

Tickets available at the Jackson County Historical Society Picnic, September 11, 6:30 p.m. at Shields Ethridge Farm



DRAWING BY ALEX MURAWSKI
© SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE FARM FOUNDATION, INC.

This shed was added to the central building complex in the 1950s when Lanis Ethridge replaced old ways of working the land with mechanized methods. Today it provides a gathering place for visitors to the farm.

Tractors were used on the farm from an early date, but until the 1950s the main tasks associated with cotton production – planting, cultivating, and picking – continued to depend on the labor of tenants working with mules. The McCormick – Deering ‘F 30 Farmall’ tractor still in the shed was purchased around 1936. It was affectionately known as “Big Bertha”.

Before the realignment of Johnson Mill Road and construction of this building, this area was at the edge of a large cotton field that ran from here northwards to the woods beside the Schoolhouse. Soil conservation terraces can still be seen in this field.

The 2014 Black Pot Cooking Festival will be held at the Shields-Ethridge Heritage Farm on October 18, 2014 from 11 a.m. - 2 p.m. Rain or Shine. The Tractor Barn will hold the stage for the Blue Grass Music and tables for dining and listening.

Banks County Extension Agent and Blacksmith, John Mitchell will be cooking Chicken and Dumplings, Cornbread and Fruit Cobbler Black Pot style, in the ashes of an open fire. Take notes on cooking for your Emergency Preparedness handbook. You never know when you might need it!



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Bluegrass Music at Black Pot Cooking Festival on the Shields Ethridge Farm